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A Tough Nut to Crack (or Not)? L2 Learners' Phraseological Development Viewed From Different Perspectives

Abstract

Within the field of second language acquisition, there is a general agreement on the importance of formulaic sequences (FS). FS are ubiquitous in human discourse, facilitate idiomatic, fluent and accurate speech and are integral to communicative competence (Wray, 2002). At the same time, mastery of FS has shown to be a major challenge for second/foreign language (L2) learners (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2012). Even at an advanced level, L2 learners are known to creatively build their own non-target-like FS (Bardovi-Harlig & Stringer, 2017; Boers, 2020). Despite the importance of FS in L2 learning, longitudinal studies tracking learners' development over time are rather scarce. Yet, it is exactly this longitudinal perspective and a focus on factors influencing the learning process that are very relevant within a learning context. Additionally, it seems that many studies have adopted a 'researchers' perspective' to examine learners' phraseological development, in the sense that in these studies, it is the researcher who evaluates learners' development. Adding different eyes and different voices may help to get a fuller understanding of which factors are at play in the process of learning FS, and how a non-target-like use of FS is perceived in a workplace context. This invited paper, based on my keynote talk given at EUROPHRAS 2025, focuses on (1) factors affecting L2 German learners' phraseological development viewed from a researchers' and a students' perspective, (2) the perception of L2 users' non-target-like FS viewed from a L1 business perspective, and (3) implications for the classroom and avenues for future research.

Keywords

phraseology; collocations; pragmatic expressions; German as a foreign language; longitudinal research; item-related factors, learner-related factors; perception study

1. Introduction

Over the past 25 years, there has been a growing recognition of the role of formulaic language in second language acquisition. The term 'formulaic sequences' (FS) is often used as an umbrella term for a range of multiword combinations, such as collocations (e.g., *hard work*, *strong tea*), phrasal verbs (e.g., *look forward to*, *come up with*), lexical bundles (e.g., *on the other hand*, *I don't know if*), binomials (e.g., *loud and clear*, *black and white*), conventional expressions (e.g., *nice to meet you*, *no problem*), idioms (e.g., *break a leg*, *kill two birds with one stone*), proverbs (e.g., *all that glitters is not gold*, *no man is an island*), and other types of formulaic language (e.g., Boers, 2020; Schmitt, 2004; Wood, 2015; Wray, 2000). One of the reasons why these units are of great importance is that they are widespread in language (e.g., Erman & Warren, 2000; Wray, 2002). Second, FS are integral to communicative competence and play a crucial role when it comes to the fluent, accurate and idiomatic production of both spoken and written language (e.g., Boers et al., 2006; Sinclair, 1991; Wood, 2006), or, as Wray puts it: "To know a language, you must know not only its individual words, but also how they fit together." (Wray, 2002, p. 143).

Despite their importance, mastery of FS has been found to be a major challenge for L2 learners, especially regarding their production (e.g., Boers et al., 2014; Boers & Lindstromberg, 2012; Laufer & Waldman, 2011; Nesselhauf, 2003). Even at an advanced level, L2 learners are known to creatively build their own non-target-like FS (Bardovi-Harlig & Stringer, 2017; Boers, 2020; Kecskes, 2007).

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Unsurprisingly, some learners seem to deal with these difficulties better than others, since large individual variation in phrasal knowledge has been observed (e.g., Dörnyei et al., 2004; Li & Schmitt, 2010). This variation may, in part, be the result of a number of learner-related variables that have been linked to the acquisition, processing or use of FS and include factors – often interrelated – such as age of onset (Foster et al., 2014), language aptitude (Ellis & Sinclair, 1996; Forsberg Lundell & Sandgren, 2013; Granena & Long, 2013), motivation (Arvidsson, 2021; Dörnyei et al., 2004), exposure (Bolibaugh & Foster, 2013; Foster et al., 2014), social interaction (Boone, 2021; Dörnyei et al., 2004), self-efficacy and self-regulation (Arvidsson, 2021), prior L2 vocabulary knowledge (Vilkaitė, 2017; Vu & Peters, 2022), phonological short-term memory (Boone & Eyckmans, 2019; Skrzypek & Singleton, 2013), and L2 exposure and immersion (González Fernández & Schmitt, 2015). There are also a number of item-related factors that have been found to influence the learning of FS, more specifically, the learning of collocations, such as L1-L2 congruency (Ding & Reynolds, 2019; Vu & Peters, 2022; Wolter & Gyllstad, 2013), collocation frequency (Durrant, 2014; Wolter & Gyllstad, 2013; Wolter & Yamashita, 2018) and frequency of node words (Nguyen & Webb, 2017).

What called my attention in the literature, however, was that first, there were not many longitudinal studies examining L2 learners' formulaic development over time, focusing at the same time on factors that affect the learning process. Yet, it is exactly this longitudinal perspective and a focus on these factors that hold particular relevance within the context of language learning. Naturally, longitudinal studies require longer time scales compared to cross-sectional studies, and researchers need to wait a long time before some key research questions can be answered. However, I think that they are extremely valuable, because language learning just takes time. Second, it seems that in the field of second language acquisition, many studies on FS that have been published in Web of Science-journals, focus on English as a second/foreign language. L2 languages such as French (e.g., Arvidsson, 2019; Edmonds & Gudmestad, 2021; Forsberg Lundell et al., 2018), Spanish (e.g., Erman et al., 2015; Stengers & Boers, 2015) or Italian (Siyanova-Chanturia, 2015; Siyanova-Chanturia & Spina, 2020) have been explored to some extent as well, but there is still a need for more studies on L2 German (e.g., Hallsteinsdóttir et al., 2006; Mena Martínez et al., 2021; Peters, 2012; Targońska, 2014). Third, I noticed that many studies in the field have adopted a 'researchers' perspective' to investigate learners' phrasal development, in the sense that in these studies, it is the researcher who judges or evaluates learners' competence and the extent to which this competence improved or not. Thus, it was my goal to explore the topic from different perspectives during my doctoral research, and to add some different eyes and different voices: those from the learners themselves, and those from L1 business professionals. This may help to get a fuller understanding of how the learning process and the outcome of the learning – although it is actually a never-ending process – is perceived by the learners themselves and by L1 professionals in a workplace context.

In this article, I will share some findings from my doctoral research about factors affecting L2 German learners' phraseological development over time, both from a longitudinal researchers' perspective and a students' perspective. Then, I will present a study about the perception of L2 users' non-target-like formulaic language use from a L1 workplace perspective. I will conclude with implications for the L2 classroom and avenues for future research.

2. Factors Affecting L2 German Learners' Phraseological Development Over Time

Collocations (e.g., *pay attention*) are one type of formulaic language. In a broad sense, the concept "collocation basically refers to a syntagmatic relationship among words which co-occur" (Wood, 2019, p. 31). However, precise definitions have varied according to researchers' analytical approach. In the phraseological approach, a collocation – very broadly speaking – is a type of restricted word combination based on the semantic and/or syntactic relationship between two (or more) words (e.g., Howarth, 1998). The frequency-based approach considers collocations to be sets of words that have a high statistical probability of appearing together in natural language (e.g., Firth, 1957; Sinclair,

1991). Granger and Paquot (2008) argued for a definition that takes account of frequency, semantics, and syntax all together. In Boone et al. (2023), we adopted this hybrid approach, and “take a collocation to be a word combination that (a) represents a specific syntactic pattern (e.g., adjective-noun, verb-noun), (b) occurs within a given word span in a corpus, and (c) has a relatively transparent meaning” (Boone et al., 2023, p. 504). Some example items in German are *enger Zusammenhang* („close connection“), *werdende Mutter* („expectant mother“), *eine Rolle spielen* („play a role“).

As I mentioned in the introduction, there are few studies that have addressed learners’ longitudinal productive collocation development. The ones that have addressed this subject, have mainly focused on learners’ use of collocations in (academic) writing (e.g., Edmonds & Gudmestad, 2021; Li & Schmitt, 2010; Siyanova-Chanturia, 2015; Siyanova-Chanturia & Spina, 2020) or were intervention studies to test the effect of a specific type of input on the incidental acquisition of collocations (e.g., Vu & Peters, 2022). These studies ranged in duration from 9 weeks (Vu & Peters, 2022) to 21 months (Edmonds & Gudmestad, 2021), so it seemed worthwhile to examine collocation development over a longer time period. In addition, with the exception of Vu and Peters (2022), previous relevant longitudinal studies did not take into account a broad range of item- and learner-related variables. Examining item-related variables may help to identify characteristics that make collocations comparatively easy or hard to learn, and whether the effect of these variables changes during the learning process. Additionally, it is crucial to take account of individual learner profiles to see how these influence collocation development.

2.1. Researchers’ Perspective

Therefore, together with two colleagues, I conducted a quantitative study that aimed to add to the existing body of research on collocation development by: (a) adopting a 3-year longitudinal design, (b) testing learners’ productive collocation knowledge in a form recall test format, (c) taking into account several item- and learner-related variables, and (d) exploring an relatively underrepresented L2, namely German (Boone et al., 2023). In this study, a productive collocation form recall test was developed and used, which took the form of a gap-fill translation test to measure students’ productive collocation knowledge. The test, comprising 35 items, was administered annually over a three-year period to a sample of about 50 Dutch-speaking university learners of German. I use the word ‘about’, because there was some drop-out because of the longitudinal design. Answers of the students were scored binary: correct or incorrect. The item-related variables investigated were L1-L2 congruency, corpus frequency, association strength (i.e., the strength of association between the collocation components, often measured by statistical measures such as Mutual Information scores) and imageability. The learner-related variables were prior productive single-word vocabulary knowledge (measured by a vocabulary test, developed by the Institute for Test Research and Test Development in Leipzig, Germany, and modeled after the Productive Vocabulary Levels Test for English (Laufer & Nation, 1999)) and L2 immersion (i.e., having spent a semester abroad in a German-speaking country). Generalized linear mixed-effects models were used to examine the influence of time, as well as learner- and item-related variables, on students’ collocation scores. The results (for tables and figures, see Boone et al., 2023) indicate that there was a general increase in collocation knowledge after three years – as expected –, because participants were motivated language specialists who engaged with German almost daily at university. However, focusing on the total score per learner (from 0 to 35), the findings reveal that learners made general progress, but that there was also some forgetting. Even after three years, not one learner was able to produce all 35 collocations correctly. This finding is in line with previous studies that have shown that the acquisition of collocations is slow and challenging even for advanced learners, and is thus a tough nut to crack (e.g., Boers et al., 2014; Laufer & Waldman, 2011; Nesselhauf, 2003). The results further point to substantial variation in item scores, suggesting that some items are more challenging to acquire than others. Additionally, considerable

individual variation between learners was observed. This brings us to the item- and learner-related factors influencing learners' collocation development.

Regarding the item-related variables, the generalized linear mixed models showed that congruency (i.e., the presence of a literal translation equivalent in the L1) was a significant predictor for learners' productive collocation development. This congruency effect is an effect that has been observed in collocation research in other language pairs too (e.g., Nesselhauf, 2003; Wolter & Gyllstad, 2013; Ding & Reynolds, 2019; Vu & Peters, 2022). What is new, however, is how the congruency effect looks like over time. In our study, students' knowledge of congruent collocations remained comparatively stable from time 1 to time 3, whereas their knowledge of incongruent collocations significantly rose over time and with a growing proficiency level. The other variables investigated – frequency, association strength and imageability – were not found to influence collocation learning. In some studies, collocation frequency has been found to be an influencing factor for collocation learning (e.g., González Fernández & Schmitt, 2015), in other studies it has not (Vu & Peters, 2022). It thus seems that this relationship is not straightforward, and that findings may depend on the corpus and/or the target items used. The nonsignificant finding for association strength is in line with other studies (e.g., Durrant, 2014; González Fernández & Schmitt, 2015). Regarding imageability, Steinel et al. (2007) suggests that imageability facilitates the learning of L2 idioms, although this could not be confirmed in our study on L2 collocation learning. However, more research is needed. As for the learner-related variables, students' prior vocabulary knowledge emerged as a significant predictor for their collocation learning over time, in line with the results of other studies on collocation learning (e.g., Nguyen & Webb, 2017; Vu & Peters, 2022). In other words, the more single words students knew in the beginning of their learning trajectory, the better they learned collocations. L2 immersion was not found to influence students' collocation development.

A study that zoomed in on this study abroad (SA) experience was a qualitative study with a 6-month longitudinal case study design, exploring the influence of host country and social interaction on learners' development of FS – both collocations and pragmatic expressions – in L2 German (Boone, 2021). In particular, the study presents four case studies, with two Dutch-speaking university language learners (majoring in German and another foreign language) spending a semester abroad in Germany, and two others in a non-German-speaking country, namely Spain and Russia. Students' phraseological development was measured pre- and post-SA by using a productive collocation task (to measure collocation development) and an oral discourse-completion task (to measure the development of formulaic pragmatic expressions). Students' social interaction patterns were explored using the Study Abroad Social Interaction Questionnaire (Dewey et al., 2013). Two semi-structured interviews with each of the participants, one during and one post-SA, were also conducted. The findings of this study indicate that access to social interaction in the target language fosters phrasal development, especially the development of pragmatic expressions. This might not be very surprising, but interestingly, gains in L2 German were not only achieved by one of the students staying in Germany, but also by the student staying in Spain, who appeared to have interacted intensively with German exchange students there. The other student in Germany did not make much progress, probably because there was a lack of L2 interaction, which was also the case for the student staying in Russia. This suggests that the country of destination does not per se determine students' formulaic language development, but that social interaction with people of the target language community does.

2.2. Students' Perspective

After the two studies with a classical researchers' perspective (Boone et al., 2023; Boone, 2021), there is another study that I would like to mention, which takes a clear students' perspective. It concerns an in-depth exploration of the intro- and retrospective views of five Dutch-speaking L2 students of German on their 3-year collocation learning process. It focuses on the individual factors that enhanced or hindered L2 collocation development, and on the extent to which effective and less

effective collocation learners differed regarding their L2 motivation, exposure and use, learning experience, and learning strategies (Boone & Eyckmans, 2023). For this study, extreme sampling strategy was used, following the approach of other qualitative studies on FS (Arvidsson, 2021; Dörnyei et al., 2004). Five contrasting cases of learners were selected from the sample that participated in the preceding quantitative longitudinal study (Boone et al., 2023): The three students with the highest score on the 3rd collocation test, and the two students with the lowest score on the 3rd collocation test. In the interviews, the learners reflected on their trajectories. In addition, they were asked to produce a written reflection on five specific collocations. Also there, the aim was to examine the extreme cases, so the focus was on the two collocations with the highest mean score and the three collocations with the lowest mean score from the 3rd collocation test in the preceding quantitative longitudinal study. Both the interviews and the written reflections were analyzed using a deductive, theoretically driven thematic analysis, following the framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87). The focus was on the categories: L2 motivation, L2 exposure and use, L2 learning experience, and L2 learning strategies. The qualitative analysis indicated that the effective collocation learners, compared to the less effective collocation learners, showed a higher intrinsic motivation and more engagement in both formal and informal learning activities. They also engaged in more extensive social interactions with L1 speakers, demonstrated a higher awareness towards collocations and exhibited a higher degree of self-regulation. Although the study contains many interesting quotes of all five students (see Boone & Eyckmans, 2023), I will only present a number of quotes of Emma (which is a fictitious name) here, who was one of the effective collocation learners. Her study abroad experience in Austria, for example, seemed the perfect opportunity for her to learn collocations. She said: “Every time when I heard something that sounded nice together, I saved it in my phone”. She was also very effective and creative in her learning strategies, and gives an example about how she could remember the German collocation *Stellung nehmen* (“to take a stand on something”): “To remember this one, I use a mental picture. As if there would be a little man in my head who stands by his opinion and says ‘I’ll take this one.’”. During her learning trajectory, Emma also becomes aware of the importance of collocations, which also has an effect on her motivation. She said about this: “For me, it was motivating that I noticed that my speaking improved [because of the collocations]”. What is also very interesting, is that Emma – and also the other effective learners – reported that they struggled with learning collocations, despite having studied German intensively for several years. This is illustrated by the following quote: “I often hit my limits and then I think how much work is still needed. That motivates me in a way. It also demotivates me sometimes, but it encourages me to work hard”. This seems to suggest that phraseological development – seen from the eyes of the students – is indeed a tough nut to crack.

3. L2 Users’ Unconventional Formulaic Language Use From an L1 Workplace Perspective

Until now, I have explored two perspectives: the researchers’ perspective and the students’ perspective. One perspective that I would like to add, is that from the L1 workplace. I believe that this perspective is also very relevant, because after having studied for several years, students embark on a professional career. I guess that the ultimate dream of many language teachers is that their students enter the labor market with a perfect command of the language, including L2 formulaic sequences. Research has shown, however, that this is often not the case and that learners creatively build their own, often inappropriate and non-target-like formulaic expressions, reflecting their interlanguage competence (e.g., Taguchi & Roever, 2017; Bardovi-Harlig & Stringer, 2017). Although students are trained well to become multilingual professionals, I also noticed in my own language classes that even language students in their master’s still use expressions that would never be used by L1 speakers of German. Since these students actually have a very advanced level of German and would probably use German in their jobs, I was wondering how their use of those ‘non-target-like expressions’ would

be perceived by L1 German business professionals. Therefore, together with two colleagues, I set up an experimental study with two conditions and both quantitative and qualitative data, to examine – as a first research question – how non-target-like formulaic expressions used by advanced L2 speakers of German are perceived by L1 German business professionals in terms of appropriateness, acceptability and communicative competence (Boone et al., 2022). In the experiment, two conditions were created: one in which the writer of the expression was explicitly described as an L2 user of German and where L1 raters knew that someone with Dutch as L1 wrote the expression (i.e., ‘intercultural condition’), and one condition in which this was not specified (i.e., ‘German condition’). In the ‘German condition’, however, it was not mentioned that the writer of the expression was an L1 speaker, because this would have made some of the non-target-like expressions unrealistic. The aim of the second research question was to determine what kind of deviation from the target-like norm affected the L1 ratings: a misspelling, a grammatical error, a sociopragmatic infelicity (caused due to a lack of awareness of the socio-cultural norms in a particular society), or a pragmalinguistic infelicity (which may result from interlanguage-specific errors or from an inappropriate pragmatic transfer). Fifty-four Dutch-speaking master’s students of German and 16 L1 speakers of German were asked to complete a written discourse completion task, in which they had to write an e-mail response to a specific situation in a workplace setting. The production data from the students were used to design the experiment, whereas the data of the L1 speakers were employed to identify the formulaic expressions that members of the German-speaking community commonly use in each particular situation. Only the expressions given by at least 50 percent of the L1 speakers were considered to be a formulaic expression for the purposes of the study. There were 15 formulaic expressions that were used as a baseline stimulus. Then, four types of deviations from the target-like norm were manipulated in the expressions: a misspelling, a grammatical error, a sociopragmatic infelicity and a pragmalinguistic infelicity. The ‘conventional’ expression (as given by the L1 speakers, so without any specific ‘errors’) was also included. In a next step, 84 L1 German business professionals were asked to rate the 15 formulaic expressions on a 7-point Likert scale for acceptability, appropriateness and communicative competence and to complete an obligatory open-ended response to justify their ratings. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions, resulting in 44 participants in the intercultural condition, and 40 in the German condition. The results (for tables and more details, see Boone et al., 2022) showed that in general, ratings from the L1 business professionals were quite positive for all three measures. The overall ratings in the intercultural condition were higher than those in the German condition. Also, the type of deviation from the target-like norm seemed to affect the ratings. Grammatical errors, for example, were judged as less acceptable than pragmatic infelicities and misspellings, although they were rated as more acceptable in the intercultural condition. Interestingly, when raters had to judge the communicative competence of the writer, ratings in the intercultural condition were significantly higher than those in the German condition, for the exact same linguistic performance. In what follows, a few quotations (taken from Boone et al., 2022) from the open-ended responses of the L1 business professionals (translated into English for ease of reading) will be given. One frequent observation in these qualitative data was the comment that a non-target-like use of formulaic expressions is forgivable when the intention or content of the expression is clear. This is illustrated by the following comment: “The awkward wording is striking, but the message is clear”. Raters also pointed to the fact that the use of a non-target-like expression is forgivable in L1-L2 communication, for example: “Sounds a bit awkward, but personally I would not mind. Communication across borders is just like that. Anyone who complains about this should rethink priorities”. On top of expressing tolerance, an appreciative attitude towards L2 employees using German was also demonstrated in some cases. One illustrative quote is: “The small grammatical error only makes the sentence more appealing as it shows that the Flemish colleague is trying to write an encouraging message in the mother tongue of her colleague”. Thus, it seems that both quantitative and qualitative data point to the fact that in an intercultural workplace context, getting the message

across is more important than linguistic correctness, and that it is very much appreciated when L2 users communicate in the language of their business partners, in this case, German.

4. Implications for the L2 Classroom

Viewed from a longitudinal perspective (Boone et al., 2023), it became clear that the development of phrasal knowledge is challenging, even for students who are aiming to become language specialists. It is a slow and non-linear process, characterized by substantial variation between learners and between collocations. For example, congruent collocations were generally better learned than incongruent ones. This congruency effect is in line with previous research, but the pattern in learners' performance that was revealed through the longitudinal design is interesting in terms of pedagogical implications. Since it was found that students' L2 knowledge of congruent collocations was rather high in the beginning of their learning trajectory, it could be assumed that learners will be able to learn congruent collocations independently or at least without a targeted didactic focus. However, there was only a slight increase in recall scores for congruent collocations over time (i.e., from 55% at time 1 to 70% at time 3), which points to the fact that learning congruent collocations might not be that easy after all. This may be a good reason to focus on congruent collocations in class from an L1- and a plurilingual perspective and to verify, for example, with exercises or tests, whether students are indeed familiar with these collocations. For incongruent collocations, it was shown that learners' knowledge of these items improved each year, although these collocations seemed more difficult to acquire in the beginning of a learning trajectory. Therefore, I would recommend that teachers should give attention to incongruent collocations especially at early proficiency levels and alert students regularly to the differences between the languages. This could be done, for example, by means of contrastive analysis and translation tasks from L2 into L1 and from L1 into L2, an activity that has been shown to enhance learners' passive and active recall of single words and collocations (Laufer & Girsai, 2008).

Concerning the variation in learners' phraseological development, students' prior L2 productive single word vocabulary size showed to be a predictor for their L2 collocation development. Thus, building up a large vocabulary in the beginning of a learning trajectory and expanding the mental lexicon seems very important, although the focus should not only be on single words. Research has shown that presenting collocations to learners as intact wholes has shown to be beneficial for learning (e.g., Boers et al., 2014). In any case, teachers should motivate their learners to engage in different vocabulary exercises, to offer them learning materials such as gap-fill exercises, reading texts, or audiovisual materials, to help them find an effective study method, and to ensure that they are making progress.

Another learner-related factor found to positively influence phrasal development was social interaction in the L2. Since it was not exclusively linked to a semester abroad, teachers could thus encourage learners to have conversations in the L2, both abroad, and in the home country, for example, through buddy programs or through other activities where L1 speakers – in person or online – are involved. They could also motivate learners to engage in activities such as watching subtitled movies or series, reading, listening to music in German, and traveling to German-speaking countries. I think that for many language teachers, these suggestions may not be new, and match the general pedagogical implications made by other researchers in the field of foreign/second language acquisition. However, it is important to note that the learners themselves – the effective collocation learners – considered these activities helpful when reflecting on their phrasal development.

The data of the learners themselves also confirmed that learners vary in their tendency to pay attention to formal features in the linguistic input (Schmidt, 2012), and that they differ in their collocation awareness. I believe that teachers can help create this awareness from the beginning of a learning trajectory, and that they should implement different types of phrase-focused activities in class,

for which I refer to studies in the field of phraseodidactics (e.g., Chrissou, 2022; Hallsteinsdóttir, 2020).

The recommendations I have given until now, should be seen in the context of language teaching courses, where the main aim for language teachers is that students master the language at a certain level of proficiency, and produce correct language at that level of proficiency. However, in the study with L1 business professionals, getting the message across was valued over linguistic correctness. This does not mean that teachers should not strive to improve students' proficiency by means of formulaic sequences. On the contrary, I think it is important that teachers offer the students a large number of FS and provide students with many opportunities to produce these FS, which are a particular speech community's preferred ways of saying things. At the same time, however, they should point out that a target-like command of the L2 is not always expected in an intercultural business context, as long as the message is clear, and that communicating in the L2 is very much appreciated by L1 speakers, who, in that case, are tolerant towards mistakes. By giving this message, teachers could create a supportive atmosphere in which learners are motivated to produce FS. In some professions, however, linguistic or pragmatic correctness may be more important than getting the message across. Thus, teachers who want to prepare their students for careers in a specific area should be aware of this and adapt their teaching to the prerequisites of different student groups. In any case, because of the importance of FS for communicative competence, it is clear that FS deserve a place in the L2 classroom and that they should receive more attention than they have received until now.

5. Conclusion

While the studies I presented on L2 learners' productive phrasal development were limited to one target language, German, and two types of formulaic language (collocations and pragmatic expressions), they revealed important findings and avenues for future research. One future avenue lies in the exploration of more item-related factors (e.g., type of collocation, item length, ...) and learner-related factors (e.g., attitude, personality, emotions, ...), since only a limited number of factors has been explored during my doctoral research. In addition, a perspective that merits further examination, is the teachers' perspective. It would thus be interesting for future research to examine, for example, whether language teachers – instructing German and/or other modern foreign languages at different educational levels – are aware of the importance of FS in foreign language acquisition, whether and how FS are embedded in teachers' current practices in the L2 classroom, and how teachers perceive the effectiveness of several phrase-focused activities in class or in textbooks. To conclude, I believe that further longitudinal studies combining qualitative and quantitative data should be conducted, since these mixed-method approaches hold great promise for researching learners' phraseological development over time.

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